

6-1-1970

# Ceramic sculpture and sculptural containers

William Rodler

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses>

---

## Recommended Citation

Rodler, William, "Ceramic sculpture and sculptural containers" (1970). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Thesis/Dissertation Collections at RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact [ritscholarworks@rit.edu](mailto:ritscholarworks@rit.edu).

CERAMIC SCULPTURE AND SCULPTURAL CONTAINERS

*William Rodler*

*Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts  
from the College of Fine and Applied Arts  
Rochester Institute of Technology*

*June 1, 1970*

*Hobart Cowles, Advisor*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>THESIS PROPOSAL</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>THE EVOLUTION OF SCULPTURE</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>THE ARTISTS PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>CLAY BODIES AND GLAZES</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>THE THESIS PROJECT</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>ILLUSTRATIONS</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	<i>49</i>

*THESIS PROPOSAL*



## THESIS PROPOSAL

*The purpose of this thesis is to design and execute a series of ceramic sculptures and sculptural containers which reflect my personal creative philosophy as well as my individual style of aesthetic expression.*

*These ceramic sculptures and sculptural containers to some extent, will be synthesized interpretations of organic and biomorphic forms from nature, which beside depicting the finest aesthetic features of various natural forms will also express the essential spiritual interpretation of natural objects and the characteristic gestures of natural forces.*

*In carrying through this series of sculptural works based upon the natural stimuli of organic and biomorphic forms, I intend to employ a technical simplicity which puts chief emphasis upon sensitive form and expressive images.*

*The methods of direct handbuilt ceramic sculpture will be employed, utilizing slab built, coil built, and wheel thrown forms sensitively integrated into expressive sculptural compositions.*

*It has long been my feeling that in any piece of sculpture, interpretation and significance lie in the contemplative response of the viewer as he becomes aware of relationships of mass, space, texture and light.*

*It is my intention to create an esthetic unity in these sculptures of organic and biomorphic forms which include within them enough variation to create contrasts and complexities that will challenge the viewer looking to understand the theme and order of these pieces of sculpture.*

*THE*  
*EVOLUTION OF SCULPTURE*



## *THE EVOLUTION OF SCULPTURAL EXPRESSION*

*Sculpture had its origin in the forming of figures for primitive magic and, later for religious ritual. This early association of sculpture with magic has been an ever present influence on sculptural forms and expressions all throughout the history of the sculptural arts.*

*Sculpture has the ability to give corporeal reality to man's hopes, memories, and fantasies. \* Consequently, sculptural works have served more prominently than painted images as vessels for the souls of departed beings and Pharoahs, and as totems and cult objects among primitive men.*

*The capacity of sculpture to occupy real space and to compel belief in its claims to be alive, distinguishes it from painting and graphic art in general. Consequently, sculpture has remained throughout its history of changing form, material, and social function - the art of making three-dimensional materials come alive in order to objectify human fantasies, record human personality and achievement, and satisfy human longings for perfection.*

*The sculpture of the old agrarian civilizations resemble and reflect the stone blocks, marble slab or tree log from which it was carved, because the sculptural materials and processes used in ancient carved sculpture*

strongly influenced the finished sculptural image. Egyptian statues and monuments for example were carved from huge extremely hard granite stones which resist fine detailed carving, as a result Egyptian sculpture is characterized by large simplified forms which adhere closely to the shape of the original stone block. This type of sculpture that was carved from large stone blocks was monolithic (similar in form to a single stone).

Throughout the ensuing years, sculptural styles and sculptural forms have undergone many noticeable changes due in part to the sculptor's desire to exert more aesthetic control over his media and the finished sculptural form.

The emphasis in sculpture moved from static solid carved stone or wood monumental images to open forms that extended in space which were to be exemplary of a new expressive movement in sculpture.

In direct relation to the move away from the static forms of early traditional sculpture, the sculptural forms of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, two well known British sculptors, were especially significant in the evolution of sculptural expression in as much as they ushered in a bold new concept in sculptural composition that would have far reaching influence on sculptors and



their work for years to come. They introduced the anti-form in sculpture, or the "hole" or the "pierced form", a relatively simple concept with unlimited potential for application in sculptural composition.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of closed form sculpture, was in its tendency to occupy space without bearing any relation to the negative space surrounding it. A piece of sculpture had always been a thing along with other things, devoid of any anti-form or negative areas.

The pierced forms of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth entailed both a literal and a spiritual break away from the tradition of the closed forms with their mass and volume, along with everything else associated with this attribute of early sculpture. They made the "hole", or the pierced form central to their work, and fully exploited its potentialities as a sculptural device.

The new emphasis on the "hole" in sculpture brought about a tauter, simpler, more powerful configuration which was more clearly three-dimensional in style, dictated only by the artists poetic demands from the material.

It was an especially significant revelation for sculptors when they realized that anti-form, or negative space is just as important as form itself, and that a relationship exists between the succession of full

*closed forms and the empty negative spaces. The piercing of sculptural mass intimately related form and space to one another, thus the form was no longer superior to space as a new balance and harmony in sculpture was achieved.*

*The incorporation of the "hole" in sculptural expression brought about a marriage between the form and infinite space. The result of this innovation is discernible in a sensation of spaciousness and clarity far transcending the actual dimensions of the sculpture itself.*

*- Sculptural theorism and experimentation continued for some time as sculptors of every conceivable caliber tried radical procedures, simplifications, exaggerations and distortions, in an effort to arrive at "significant form".*

*Continued dissatisfaction in the world of sculpture with early traditional sculpture styles led to a sculptural rebellion against realism, romantic attitudes, and sentimental themes, as sculptors sought to rediscover the basic elements of sculpture in order to erect a new set of canons on logical foundations.*

*By the beginning of the twentieth century the pictorial conquest of the external world by sculptors*

*had been completed and refined with the result that the more adventurous, original sculptors had become bored with copying nature. Driven by a powerful impulse that appears to have manifested itself in all the arts, sculptors abandoned imitation of natural appearance in favor of aesthetic translation.*

*Whereas the sculptor of the realistic school relied upon the appeal of the associative quality of the subject represented, the modern sculptor concentrated on unrestrained variety and directness of presentation in three-dimensional forms.*

*Those sculptors who broke away from traditional realism proved that sculptural forms can be regarded not as imitations of nature to be judged by their fidelity to the model, but as creations in themselves. They were striving to interest less by subject matter and picturesqueness than by plastic form.*

*The history of sculpture has proven to be a history of innovation in material and technique, changes in form concept, and shifts in the interrelations of the various media with the pursuit of vitality remaining constant. Ancient conceptions of volume and mass have been revised under the impact of new sculpture media and related sculptural processes resulting from modern science and*



*technology. Classical notions of order and stability have given way to new emphasis on dynamism.*

*Traditional monolithic sculpture was formally abandoned as the basic sculptural form with the advent of the twentieth century art movement known as constructivism, which promotes as its primary consideration, the defining of space and motion by using structural elements through which space can best be defined and movement obtained.*

*The principle objective of the constructivist sculptors was to move from illusionistic into literal space to produce a work of art that exists in time and space.*

*The constructivists introduced a variety of sculptural innovations that had their revolutionary influence on the world of sculpture, such as the use of translucent materials as a media for serious sculpture, penetration of sculptural form, and the employment of lines in tension to describe direction.*

*The sculptor as a constructivist was no longer interested in interpreting mass, volume, the illusion of reality, or the expression of personal emotions, but instead became preoccupied with the problems of shaping his beliefs and revealing his notions.*

*Constructivism developed out of man's own tendency and willingness to perceive space, and artists have long attempted to nurture man's sensitivity to space by provoking slight as well as pronounced impressions of depth.*

*The constructivists eventually became capable of creating sculpture that not only occupied and suggested space but actually began to define it.*

*Modern sculptors continue to investigate new sculptural innovations that will enable space and motion to become the fourth dimension of sculpture. Their sculptural forms are not meant to be a form of self indulgence that are disdainfully remote from our daily lives but rather an optical reference similar to transformations in psychology and aesthetics. Modern sculpture reflects a new reality as unique as today's scientific discoveries and just as full of promise.*

*Sculpture has developed to a point that only a few years ago was unpredictable, since there are no longer any restrictions of any type or consequence imposed on the sculptor. He has complete freedom of sculptural form and expression and any conceivable possibility is open to him, enabling him to exploit any theme, idea, emotion, object, use any materials, utilize any techniques, say*



anything he wishes in his sculpture to create aesthetic value.

The value of sculpture today lies not so much in portrayal of forms whose representational connotations are apparent and familiar, but in conceptions derived from structure. The creative sculptor today is an explorer, a scientist, an inventor, not a story teller, since sculpture like other art forms is a process of exploring basic truths and discovering significant values. In every work of sculpture there can be traced the means of satisfying a human or cultural need.

The sculptor of today creates new sculptural realities, separate entities, that project into the future of thought and sensation. They are realities that were non-existent before he created them. They are not illusionary, but objects formed by the sculptor that consist of real matter, that are affected by time, occupy and penetrate space and convey some content.

In each new age new and distinct tendencies evolve in sculpture expressing many conceptions of our destiny.

Sculpture today, then, is its own reality, it is the existence, in relation to time, space, form, and content, of that which responds to manipulation.

*The present includes the past, and a line of development in the world of modern sculpture is not an arbitrary process laid down for reasons of critical convenience with a point of departure and a freer more mature point of arrival.*

*It would seem then, that, the greatest contribution that sculpture can make to one's understanding and appreciation of life, is to be exemplary of the truths about the processes of the life of the times.*

*THE*

*ARTISTS PERSONAL*

*PHILOSOPHY*



## *THE ARTISTS' PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY*

*When one speaks of having his own personal philosophy in relation to a creative art form such as sculpture, it is possible to create the misconception that this person has a very definite, set attitude toward this subject, or has a very rigid dogmatic devotion to a particular style of sculpture as well as his approach to creating sculpture.*

*This is not the case in my situation, for though I maintain some definite pro and con feelings toward sculpture styles and techniques and approaches, I seriously feel it is of utmost importance for an artist to maintain both an open adventurous mind toward new innovations of expression in his media as well as a sincere esthetic appreciation of the creative objects and innovations accomplished with this media by artists who have preceded him in past years.*

*The art of sculpture with its direct impact of volume, space, and movement, plus the changing three dimensional richness of form, texture and light, has always been the art that caught my mind and senses.*

*I have many feelings about the art of sculpture and sculpture has many different meanings to me.*

*Sculpture has a special meaning to me when I produce it and a very discernible different meaning when I approach it as a finished work, whether it is my own or any other sculptor's work.*

As a sculptor, I have more than one concern over the eventual and ultimate meaning of my sculpture pieces, not only to myself but to any others who will view them as well.

I am first of all concerned when executing a piece of sculpture with my ability to make it as vital and energized a three-dimensional statement as my creative senses permit.

My very earliest pieces of sculpture tended to be very technical representational studies of figures and objects from nature since I was quite enamoured of most any sculpture material and technique in the early stages of my sculpture experience.

However, after a considerable amount of work and experience with a variety of sculpture styles, materials and techniques, I have learned as any aspiring sculptor must learn, that the one element present in all sculpture that is of prime concern and most worthy of note, is form.

I am constantly aware and keep in mind the fact that man responds to the shape, surface, and mass of things presented to his senses much more fervently than to the style or fad characteristic of a piece of sculpture.



*I personally feel no desire to succumb to our society's pathetic fascination and enslavement for newness in sculptural fads for newness sake alone.*

*Fads may come and go in unique sculpture, but the sculpture which is not expendable in time must have a spiritual quality, and that quality is always expressed in the sculptor's handling of form.*

*My finished pieces of sculpture evolve out of a variety of sculptural techniques and compositional approaches with considerable emphasis being given to three all important features that I feel are vital for any successful work of sculpture; form, unique personal expression, and communication between sculptor and the viewer.*

*One approach to sculptural composition which I have employed many times in my work is that of complete imaginative and intuitive expression. For the most part, these works were frankly experimental but they would very often yield new insights into the handling of the plastic sculptural forms. They were all fascinating, adventurous sculpture experiences with a good deal of critical but beneficial problem solving playing a vital role*

*Every artist develops a keen awareness of the world about him through his visual and tactile memories along with his understanding of these experiences.*

*The problem of synthesizing ones varied reactions to any visual experience is an enormous one, and in having to work from memory and impressions of a particular subject it enabled me to keep the plastic problems more in mind and I felt freer to break from a more literal interpretation of the subject.*

*The resulting pieces of sculpture were sound compositions due to the successful handling of the plastic means and in the conveying of the emotional qualities of the subject.*

*Working in these various approaches to sculpture has been very beneficial to me since the insights gained from one method would enhance the other and lead me on to a multitude of ideas from which to work.*

*As a sculptor, I have long been concerned with the fundamental relationship of natures forces and objects in as much as they have served as inspirational sources for many of my sculptural studies in the past as well as for the sculpture pieces in this thesis. In my work I try to translate directly observed aspects of nature*

*which move me deeply into meaningful expression in sculpture. Although I stated in my thesis introduction that many of my sculpture pieces would be based on various organic and biomorphic forms from nature, the relationship of my sculpture to our natural environment is intended to go well beyond mere literal translation of nature's objects or creatures.*

*My sculptural expressions are of subject not objects as I feel this reflects the inherent unity in nature. I am interested in the truly natural aspects of our world in which we cannot experience the beauty of conception, growth and life without also experiencing the ugliness of decay, starvation and death.*

*Essence could easily describe my sculpture, as I try to feel and then create the essence or the very spirit of the subject I have chosen. This often requires that I go beyond a statement as found in nature and place something of my emotions or inner feelings into a given work. I do not try to improve upon nature, but simply to personalize it.*

*I seek to add a richness of texture rather than a rawness which is inherent in some sculpture materials. I strive to relate my sculpture media either in shape or form to organic structures found in nature. Thus I find*



*freedom in the use of the material as well as ability to involve myself in something more than simple recreation. I try to avoid creating a symbol of a piece, but work to create the essence of the subject chosen.*

*More often than not, my sculpture forms begin intuitively with random shapes and composition, and as an image begins to appear, the emerging forms evoke memories and associations which in turn become the control for the crucial decisions that develop a sculptural composition and impart the necessary order, structure, and expressive quality in the completed piece.*

*My principal aim is not to impose an arbitrary design upon my subject matter, but to work toward a truly meaningful integration of abstract structure with visual reality utilizing formal elements to contain and reinforce a deeply personal response to nature.*

*All art reveals to us the dignity, delight and drama of life. Some art is highly spiritually contained and dignified, e.g. Michelangelo or Brancusi, or playfully and intellectually inventive, e.g. Calder or Oldenberg, or dramatically archetypal, e.g. Moore or Hepworth, with each artist evoking his unique, poetic spirit and feelings about life in a particular way. The creative process implies experimentation and personal discovery.*

*I feel great satisfaction in expressing my ideas in plastic sculptural form in as much as I am stimulated by the physical, intellectual and spiritual contact with my media and subject in the creative struggle with the inner structure and life of the substances and forms of nature. I strive to understand the continuity of the universe to recognize the kinship between my own life and the life of other beings from nature. My sculpture, like the natural images they define or express must follow the process of creation. Not only must they be conceived successfully, but they must be significant enough to adapt to and survive in a strange sometimes hostile environment and finally to be able to exist by themselves alone.*

*Not unlike the constructivists, I depend on the carefully studied interrelation of suspended or supported forms variously shaped and composed. I try to give my sculpture plastic quality, vitality of form, simplification without impoverishment, strong emphasis on essentials, and constant three dimensional organization of structural planes.*

*My personal style of sculptural expression has been in a constant state of change and I have discarded one*



by one all the representational features of my earlier sculpture until my work has reached a point today where it is almost completely abstract with strong expressionistic characteristics.

I find that the value of composing sculpture in an abstract or semi-abstract manner lies in the great freedom it permits in the development of aesthetically successful compositions. Unhampered by any need to represent forms in their actual form, I find by working in the abstract I am able to evolve shapes that are intrinsically interesting which become compositions that reflect the qualities typical of the natural processes in our environment. I link my abstract compositions with the vital rhythms everywhere present in natural forms around us.

I have found like many other sculptors that the quality of expressiveness in all art forms is a vital feature to all aesthetically successful art work. It is not enough to have a well organized sculptural composition for as any sculptor knows his work can be very shallow and mediocre if it lacks expressiveness. A sculptor's work should be an embodiment of his imagination and inner feelings if it is to have any unique meaning to it.

*When I speak of expressivism in sculpture I refer to the sculptor's practice of rejecting the outer world of reality for the expression of an inner world of feeling and imagination. Instead of copying nature as he sees it, the expressionistic sculptor portrays nature as he feels it, he uses nature as a medium or as subject matter to portray his inner self. When so used, a natural object becomes a vehical or symbol for conveying human emotions or feelings. The use of a natural form in a sculptural composition then becomes a means to an end and not the end itself.*

*<sup>3</sup> In the process of creating a work of expressionistic sculpture I use every possible device appropriate to my medium to convey my ideas and to provoke a similar sympathetic response in the spectator. None of these devices such as abstraction, distortion, primitivism, simplification, or minimalism are particularly new innovations since all have been used at one time or another in sculpture of earlier periods.*

*In order to achieve a unique expressionistic quality in my sculpture, it was necessary to forgo reproduction of nature in accordance with visual perception and the factual dictates of scientific knowledge. It was necessary*

*to forgo striving for the exact duplication or imitation of all the many variations and details in nature's objects. I have realized that when all artistic effort is directed toward copying the outer world of reality, the expressive quality in sculpture decreases, and in the same vein, when the greatest effort is directed towards objectifying the subjective or portraying the inner world of feeling, expressionism increases.*

*This does not mean that my work must be completely divorced from shapes and forms as they appear in nature. On the contrary, my sculpture may run the gamut from objectivity to subjectivity. Since forms constitute the language of all types of sculpture, all sculptors must be aware of the mysterious unfathomable nature of subjective or abstract sculpture forms as compared to the obvious recognizable quality of objective sculpture forms.*

*In the process of translating impressions from nature many problems are encountered which I find exhilarating, and I try to distill the best into it and eliminate all superfluity without making the composition seem empty.*

*As a sculptor I feel it is important for me to seek the truths in the world about me and to present the truth of what I have observed as I see them.*



*In this most recent phase in the development and broadening of my personal capacities as a creative sculptor, I have adopted the media and techniques of the ceramist in a serious and sincere effort on my part to become a successful ceramic sculptor.*

*My draftsmanship is executed with a potters wheel, fettling knife, simple wood paddles, and modeling tools. I interpret sculptural ideas with clay, glaze and heat instead of with wood, stone or metal, but I must still work as a draftsman.*

*All my pieces of ceramic sculpture begin in similar fashion with basic thrown or handbuilt structures which are arranged and composed to form the very structure of nature's own forms. Innovating with slabs and coils and slip, I add more detailed forms and textures to bring about more expressive images or gestures or even to bring out the mood of the image I am interpreting.*

*Eventually, with the hypothesis of the desired image established, I am able to qualify the statement, and with random shaped pieces of clay I proceed to build and develop the statement, with each new piece a new decision, and the resulting sum total to be the design of the final image. In most any form of assembled sculpture, the addition of each single piece to the whole often drastically*

*changes the composition, requiring constant reassessment of it in its entirety. I stop when I feel the piece has reached a climax that is meaningful. There is no point, when the work is completed, but rather the work simply reaches a state when nothing more for the moment seems necessary and I go on to another piece of sculpture.*

*I don't feel my sculpture pieces to be finished because I work with images of nature and life itself, and life is still being determined.*

*As I have stated earlier, a primary concern of mine as a sculptor is to express some aspect or essence of life, to give it power to make an impact on the person contemplating it. My greatest desire is to reach the viewer with my sculpture and have my interpretation of nature appreciated by the viewer to achieve that none too easy, meeting of thought between sculptor and viewer, in short, to communicate.*

*CLAY BODIES*

*AND*

*GLAZES*



## CLAY BODIES

Since I employed both wheel thrown and hand built forms in my sculpture, I needed a flexible, versatile clay body that would have sufficient plasticity and strength whether used as a throwing body or as a hand-building body. I wanted a clay body that would have considerable strength in the green stage since I work with large, heavy sculptural assemblages, and of special importance, I needed a clay body that could be fired at cone 5 to cone 9 oxidation with satisfactory body color and a minimum of warpage and cracking problems because I planned to fire a number of my sculpture pieces in a medium size electric glo-bar kiln. I tested several clay bodies, including the S.A.C. clay body, for their flexible properties and characteristics as combined throwing and hand building bodies, as well as for shrinkage and water absorption at cone five to nine oxidation.

While several of the clay bodies showed good potential for sculptural purposes, I preferred the time proven and tested S.A.C. clay body for its over all characteristics as both a throwing and hand building body for my thesis objects.

## CLAY BODY TESTS

### TEST BODY NO. 1

Redart Clay	25
Goldart Clay	50
Kentucky Special	
Ball Clay	25
Jordan Clay	25
Red Iron Oxide	2%
Fine Grog	2%

### Cone 5 Oxidation

Shrinkage	14.0
Absorption	6.0
Color	Medium grey tan

### TEST BODY NO. 2

Kentucky Special	
Ball Clay	25
XX Saggar	25
Redart Clay	50
Goldart Clay	50
Red Iron Oxide	2%
Fine Grog	20%

### Cone 5 Oxidation

Shrinkage	15.0
Absorption	6.5
Color	Gray Brown

TEST BODY NO. 3

Jordan Clay	25
XX Saggar	25
Kentucky Special	50
Redart Clay	25
Goldart Clay	50
N.A. Fire Clay	25
Fine Grog	20%

Cone 5 Oxidation

Shrinkage	14.0
Absorption	5.0
Color	Deep Buff

TEST BODY NO. 4

A.P. Green Fire Clay	25
Kentucky Special	25
Goldart Clay	50
Red Iron Oxide	2%
Redart Clay	50
Fine Grog	20%

Cone 5 Oxidation

Shrinkage	16.0
Absorption	4.0
Color	Medium Tan



S.A.C. CLAY BODY

<i>Kentucky Special</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>XX Saggar</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>N.A. Fire Clay</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Redart Clay</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Bentonite</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Red Iron Oxide</i>	<i>2%</i>
<i>Fine Grog</i>	<i>20%</i>

Cone 5 Oxidation

<i>Shrinkage</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Absorption</i>	<i>5.5%</i>
<i>Color</i>	<i>Medium Brown</i>

## GLAZES AND CLAY BODY COLORANTS

Although I thoroughly enjoy using color and great variety in glazes on my pottery, I have an entirely different attitude in regard to treatment, coloring or surface enrichment of my sculptural forms.

I have an affinity for the natural color and texture of a sculpture media such as clay, and because I have a great fascination with the vast range of rough to smooth textures that are possible to produce when sculpting with clay, I much rather prefer to utilize the natural color and texture of the clay body for a truer natural finish for the surfaces of my ceramic sculpture.

While I did use glaze on some of my sculptural containers, my sculpture pieces were enriched with a colored slip, oxide stains, kiln cement, or as I have already mentioned, fired to the natural color of the clay body.

Several of my pieces of sculpture were finished with non-ceramic colorants such as polyester resin paint, epoxy paint, acrylic paint, and car body spray lacquers, as I experimented briefly with these materials in an effort to determine their suitability or feasibility for surface enrichment for large pieces of sculpture which can be difficult to fire satisfactorily with regular ceramic glazes.

Although I was satisfied with the results of several of these non-ceramic colorants I still prefer the oxide stains, colorslip, or matt glazes as surface enriching materials for ceramic sculpture.

### GLAZES AND SLIPS

#### S.A.C. Black Slip Cone 04 to 9

Redart Clay	100.
Red Iron Oxide	5.
Copper Oxide	5.
Cobalt Oxide	2.5
Manganese Dioxide	5.0

#### S.A.C. White Slip Cone 04 to 10

Flint	55.
Bainbridge Spar	10.
Frit 3110	15.
Kaolin	15.
Bentonite	6.5
Opax	5.

#### Black Matt Cone 5 Oxidation

Albany Slip	80.
Borax	10.
Frit G-23	10.
Rutile	5.
Cobalt Oxide	2.
Red Iron Oxide	5.
Manganese Dioxide	4.

#### Ivory Matt Cone 5 Oxidation

Elbrook Feldspar	57.
Frit G-24	40.5
Dolomite	13.5
Kaolin	37.5
Fluorspar	13.5
Tin Oxide	7.5
Vanadium Pentoxide	7.5



S.A.C. 20

<i>Frit G-23</i>	<i>41.4</i>
<i>Lithium Carb.</i>	<i>2.0</i>
<i>Frit W-15</i>	<i>5.4</i>
<i>Kaolin</i>	<i>26.0</i>
<i>Flint</i>	<i>22.8</i>
<i>Tin Oxide</i>	<i>5.0</i>

*THE THESIS PROJECT*

## THE THESIS PROJECT

*When I stop to consider the number of years I have spent both studying and teaching art, as well as actually practicing the disciplines and techniques of a vast range of two and three-dimensional art forms that encompasses everything from portrait painting to pop art sculpture, it becomes obvious that it has indeed been a very circuitous route which has led me to this most recent and most intent interest in a challenging creative art form: ceramic sculpture.*

*Although I was fairly well versed in the fundamentals of ceramics, e.g., throwing, glazing, firing, etc., before I entered into the M.F.A. program in ceramics at the School For American Craftsmen, I felt it was essential to the success of my masters thesis project for me to take time in the early phase of my thesis program to refresh and strengthen my knowledge and skill with all the ceramic processes and techniques such as throwing, hand-building, glaze design and calculation and especially design and composition as related to ceramic sculpture.*

*I also found it both necessary and beneficial to make a thorough study of the most recent developments in the field of ceramics, as well as to examine the many new forms of pottery and ceramic sculpture produced by American*



as well as foreign craftsmen. Considerable time was devoted to visiting exhibits of contemporary ceramic work in a wide range of galleries, museums, and fine art craft shops as well as to the reading of current periodicals and books that dealt with all the areas of ceramics.

The many discussions I was fortunate to have with the other graduate students in the S.A.C. ceramic program, as well as with my advisor Professor Cowles were invaluable to me in my early efforts to bring about some meaningful purpose and direction to my ceramic research and sculptural endeavors.

It has always been my feeling that whether you are a professional artist or art student, you need some personal orientation with your work and the works of others to sound your creative ideas or effect some comparison to bring about a creative resonance that will enable you to make a more judicious endorsement of your own creative endeavors.

Before embarking on any of the large involved sculpture pieces from my thesis, I felt it was essential to devote some time to the testing of the clay bodies and glazes, as well as the actual throwing and hand-building methods that would all be used in the eventual construction of these sculpture pieces.

*It was equally important to me to spend considerable time and effort observing, experiencing, sketching and interpreting various organic or biomorphic forms from nature that would serve as resource ideas and possible inspiration for some of the actual sculpture pieces.*

*Even though I made numerous sketches of a variety of natural objects such as rocks, plants, marine organisms, etc., these could at best serve only as a point of departure for any of the pieces of sculpture.*

*I had no intention of creating a ceramic reproduction of any object from nature, or to attempt to improve upon that which is as aesthetically complete and pleasing as it might be possible.*

*More realistically my sculptural images and objects were designed to depict the nature or character of various natural forms, to express a spiritual interpretation of a natural object, or even to interpret the characteristic gesture of some of the many natural forces.*

*It is seldom easy to explain completely in words the ideas and inspirations that precede any particular creative act, but I did tend to fall into a working procedure whereby ideas for sculpture pieces that generated from various natural influences and inspirations were*

*developed to a further point by direct studies of related objects, to reinterpretation in two and three-dimensional sketches, and finally to a more complete interpretation as a finished sculptural object.*

*The first pieces of sculpture that I completed in the thesis project, Figures 1,2,and 3, were intended to be very obviously monolithic in physical appearance and in their interpretive aspect.*

*Although they were designed primarily as stone like forms that exist in space, I did attempt to achieve a more complete relationship between form and space, or form and anti-form by piercing the large stone like forms in Figure 1,and 2, so that the form would no longer be superior to space and a new balance and harmony with sculptural elements would be achieved.*

*Anti-form is just as important as form itself, and when a relationship exists in a piece of sculpture between the succession of full closed forms and open negative spaces, there is no interruption of form, but instead a related form series and a resulting rhythmic spatial feeling.*

*Large slabs of clay heavily grogged to control shrinkage and warping were rolled out to about a one*



inch thickness and draped over sawdust filled burlap sacks to form large shallow shell like forms. When these shell like slabs reached the early stages of leather hardness they were scored, slipped and paddled together to form the large hollow stone-like objects in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

In a later stage of leather hardness the forms were pierced and shapes were sculpturally redesigned for better overall composition. The surface of these forms was given a strong coarse visual and tactile texture to accent the heavy crude shapes.

The object in Figure 3 was not pierced as were Figures 1 and 2, but instead a series of flower forms thrown on the potters wheel and cut to shape with a fettling knife were attached in a random manner over the stone like form to create a three-dimensional landscape; whereby simple plant like forms symbolize life and growth in striking contrast to the inert stoney form.

These first three pieces were allowed to dry slowly to avoid rapid shrinkage and possible cracking, but in firing the pieces from their green stage to cone five stoneware in one firing two of them developed large cracks.

*This is a familiar technical problem all ceramic sculptors must contend with in the firing of large pieces of ceramic sculpture, fortunately it is not insurmountable.*

*It is sometimes solved by redesigning the clay body in such a way as to reduce shrinkage drastically, but in some cases this means the sacrificing of good throwing features in your clay. It can also be solved by firing the large green ceramic pieces very gradually to maturation over a period of 24 hours or better.*

*I chose the latter method in future firings and was able to avoid any repeat of this serious shrinkage and cracking problem.*

*I designed several other pieces of sculpture that were closely related in form to this first three-dimensional landscape, Figures 4 and 5, but instead of the large crude stonelike forms used earlier, these two pieces were given an overall organic appearance full of growing multiplying plant like forms.*

*The sculpture pieces in Figures 3, 4, and 5, were composed from an assemblage of hand built draped slab forms and wheel thrown forms and are suggestive of both land and marine plant life. see Figure 5.*

*Although these three sculpture pieces were more or less solid sculptural forms, I felt they related quite well with surrounding negative space as well as with natural organic environment.*

*As I have already stated earlier in this thesis my main objective was not in researching to any great degree some involved technical problem related to any ceramic material or process, but rather to design, devise, or possibly create new unique sculptural shapes and compositions.*

*In drawing from my observations and experiences with reality, I acquired many ideas which I hoped could be transformed into more ambitious, imaginative sculptural interpretations far removed from original studies in observation and imitation of appearances. I constructed several pieces of sculpture which symbolized the cellular compositions of nature's organic and biomorphic forms or objects. In using the term biomorphic, both in relation to nature and my sculpture pieces, I am referring to forms which look as if they had developed in the same way that all living organisms develop through the division of cells.*

*I decided to assemble a series of sculptural compositions which would utilize a variety of forms thrown*



*on the potters wheel, that when welded together would have the feeling and characteristics of some multi-cellular ever growing organism as in Figures 6 and 7.*

*These particualr pieces of sculpture gave me a good degree of satisfaction when they were completed, because while there is nothing very new about assembling a number of pot forms or pot segments, it is a challenge to create a unified, balanced sculptural composition with such obvious pottery forms, that can convincingly take on a new sculptural image and character upon completion as in the case of Figures 6 and 7.*

*I was well aware that this particualr approach to creating a sculptural composition could be soon overdone and monotonous, and so in the next several pieces I once again utilized hand built forms along with wheel thrown forms to create a sculptural composition which resembled a transmutation of various natural organic forms. see Figure 8.*

*One can never ignore the ever present problem of relating a sculptural form with the space it must exist in whenever you are involved in the creation of any type of sculpture.*

*In Figure 9, I feel I have achieved a marriage between the form and infinite space which is discernible in a sensation of spaciousness and clarity far transcending the actual dimensions of the sculpture itself.*

*This piece of sculpture is a facetious combination of man and computer and while it's not clear whether it is a machine like man or man like machine, I felt it a suitable theme for this day and age.*

*The large central form was constructed from two slabs of clay draped over sawdust filled burlap sacks, and the head like forms were ovoid humps of clay partially hollowed with wire loop modeling tools. The large cylinders and tapered cylinders were thrown on the potters wheel, as were the wheel like discs on the surface of the sculpture. All the parts were scored and slipped together when they were leather hard and the finished assemblage was allowed to dry gradually for two or three weeks.*

*Needless to say a piece of sculpture as large as this takes a considerable amount of time and work to build, and like many other ceramic sculptors I suffer through that period of mixed emotions when you have successfully assembled a complicated piece of sculpture that looks so good in its green stage, that you wish it wasn't necessary to risk it in a kiln firing.*

*This piece of sculpture was almost lost in the firing as it came out with numerous large cracks which*

*I had to patch and seal with an auto body fiberglass patch material called Fyber. Since I could no longer fire a ceramic glaze over the mended surface of this piece, I used a flat black automobile lacquer which I felt had an appealing semi-matt texture suitable for sculpture, thus fortunately, I was able to salvage this particular piece of sculpture in spite of the problems incurred during the bisque firing.*

*When you are thoroughly involved with a creative theme it is only natural that one idea leads to others and each completed piece of sculpture would suggest many other possible new sculptural compositions, all of which presented me with the problem of filtering out the most interesting, most unusual and most feasible innovations for actual creation.*

*The very familiar but unseen forces of nature are just as fascinating and mystifying as the more obvious objects of nature, and in Figures 10, 11, 12 15, and 16, I devised a number of sculptural assemblages which were intended to interpret and symbolize such forces as growth, tension, stress, tenacity, balance, reverberation, etc,*



*The divided or partially divided spheres in Figures 10, 11, and 12 were composed of heavy slab clay draped over semi-round clay humps, while the extended center column like forms and supporting legs were thrown on the potters wheel. The finished objects express the character of the tenacious forces which unite the molecular structure of all natural objects as well as the great stresses, and strains that are forever present along with the delicate balance in nature's biomorphic forms.*

*The balance between the negative space and the positive forms is given just as much thought as the total object or image, for even as in music where sounds as well as silence enter into the rhythm of a composition' so must positive matter and empty space enter into the harmony of a sculptural composition.*

*In constructing Figures 15 and 16, I draped clay slabs over cardboard drums to create large sheets of curved leather hard clay which were cut into elongated free form shapes of various sizes and then scored, slipped and assembled into delicately balanced structures which express the reverberation of nature's sounds and the stratification of the earth's structure.*

*The idea of the three-dimensional landscape had strong sculptural appeal to me and in Figures 13 and 14, I created some very refined, controlled slab built compositions that symbolize the subtle types of formal and informal balance that exists all about us in the myriads of natural landscapes. Figure 14 emphasized the natural rhythm that occurs in nature's landscapes as a result of the repetition of growing forms or objects which has fascinated man since time began.*

*Even though I still had many more ideas for new and different sculptural compositions in my mind, I decided to leave off with the actual sculpture pieces at this point in order to have sufficient time in which to design and create a series of ceramic containers that would each have some unique sculptural feature to their actual shape or form or in some cases to their tactile or textural surfaces.*

*In Figures 17 through 22, I have shown a number of sculptural bottles, vases, bowls or planters that were designed with crude grotesque shapes, rhythmic decorative forms, or very simple severe, rigid slab built forms.*

*The same methods of building and assembling used in my sculpture pieces such as rolling and draping clay*

slabs, throwing forms on the potters wheel and constructing forms with coils, were applied in the overall process of constructing all of these ceramic containers.

The sculptural design and treatment given to each container was carefully thought out to achieve a fine aesthetic relationship between form, texture, color and designed purpose of the object.

Several of the containers were glazed with Cone 5 or Cone 9 oxidation glazes, e.g. Figures 19, 20, and 22, while Figures 17, 18, and 21 were fired to the natural color and texture of the clay, or fired with a brushed on coat of kiln cement which creates a buff colored coarse surface.

I felt this combination of large ceramic sculpture pieces along with the unique variety of sculptural containers gave sufficient evidence and insight into the depth and quality of my ability as a sculptor and indicated both my keen interest and awareness of the aesthetics of my natural environment, as well as my desire to maintain an open investigative mind to keep astride of all new developments and innovations in the field of sculpture.



*SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION*

## *SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION*

*Art profoundly influences the intellectual and emotional realms of our lives. The artist addresses this deep psychosocial need with composed works bearing his personal emotionality and intellectuality.*

*Intellectuality and emotionality should occur in harmonious proportion in as much as an over-intellectualized, over-constructed composition may carry us to high spheres of understanding, but leave us emotionally dissatisfied. Conversely, an under-constructed composition insufficiently draws on the intellectual resources and both dis-proportionalities indicate a falling short of artistic realization.*

*I perceive an unnaturalness in limiting ones emotional range for the sake of working in a recognizable style or adopting meaningless fad approaches. Art is aspectual and abstractive from life, and therefore should embody the artists whole emotional experience of living.*

*Sculptural expression as in any art form is the externalization of emotion and inner experience through the chosen medium.*

*Ones individual style of expression is like handwriting, long learned, painfully studied and practiced, and once learned removed to the sub-conscious during its*



application all the while revealing the artists inner feelings and motivations.

In the welter of multiple styles of sculpture in the art world today, the artist is called upon to choose or develop a personal style of his own to express his ideas. Frequently the style the artist selects or invents becomes synonymous with the ideas he is supposed to be expressing, and thus technical variation is considered to be emotional depth and philosophical profundity.

Sculpture itself today is now an actual thing, not just a model of something, and as such refers less to extraneous subject matter or illusions of the same. It exists by itself, an object of the world.

To me sculpting is one of the most highly personalized forms of self-expression. It is a combination of inner personal reaction, such as taste, judgement, relation of factual knowledge and stimulated emotion, plus actually being able to successfully innovate and initiate spontaneous compositions.

I look upon the sculptural process as a searching, seeking process involving visual and tactile decisions. If a sculpture comes off it is a culmination of that



*which I have discovered about nature and about sculpture.*

*In my sculpture I try to create a new visual experience rather than recreating one of every day life, a new world of form and space existing apart from all previous experiences of the tangible external world. It is intended to have its own special logic as well as its own unique excitement.*

*I aspire to create meaningful sculpture, that appeals disquietly and gives the beholder something more lasting than a momentary visual titillation, a sculpture that arrests the viewer's interest and draws him into many levels of appreciation.*

*As a sculptor I am deeply involved with art in every phase of my life, and as I contemplate each new piece of sculpture I am trying to conceive I worry that it may not be possible to get it resolved to my satisfaction.*

*The creative process implies experimentation and personal discovery, and my sculptures have developed as a result of experiment, research, trial and failure, as well as success in trying to master my media.*

*Like any other artist I am aware that my ability to give coherent order to the jumble of images received by my senses determines the degree of success or failure of my sculpture pieces. As new ideas come to mind,*

it is necessary to test them empirically in order to solve the many problems of sculptural composition and to create a form which can shape space and exploit the versatile plastic nature of clay. My intention is to have forms within forms moving optically through negative and positive relationships and light and dark contrasts.

When I achieve a relatively successful statement in a piece of ceramic sculpture, I feel I have used light itself as well as my clay body as a medium for sculpture.

The truest and most lasting sculptures are the objects formed for the singular function of nurturing man's soul. In such objects, direct action from visual to spiritual is best effected by the least amount of intellectual inquiry.

Sculpture is a state of feeling. As a shape begins to impress itself upon the artist's sensibilities he must respond completely, pursuing that form to its fullest possible realization. Any appreciable mental intervention during this period results in either a rationalized short cut or an intellectualized exercise.

It is not my intention to negate the importance of the cerebral process to the total concept of sculptural

*expression, but to re-emphasize that the intellectual aspect suffices only for that important role of organization of that which is dependent solely upon our sensibilities.*

*An artist must work with the conviction, the sincerity and the understanding of which he is capable. Out of his own being, his own environment and his own experiences he will find a way that is best for his own expression.*

*One of the most difficult tasks for me is to verbalize thoughts I have toward my own pieces of sculpture especially in a way that might be meaningful to someone else.*

*This is true because much of what transpires in the creative process operates on the subconscious level.*

*The challenge I presented myself with in this thesis project was that of establishing an equilibrium between the realm of my conscious and sub-conscious ideas and what the clay along with my sculptural skill will permit toward the realization of these ideas into tangible form.*

*I feel satisfied that the works of sculpture completed*



*for this thesis are unique, successful examples of my personal sculptural interpretation of the objects forms and subjects from nature that have special meaning to me.*

*In the execution of these pieces of ceramic sculpture, I made every effort to utilize the natural inherent qualities of clay as a sculptural media, and as a result of my newly acquired knowledge and experience with all the ceramic processes and materials, I now have a sound mastery of a highly versitile media that has near unlimited potential as a vehicle for my future sculptural endeavors.*

*PHOTOGRAPHY*  
*BY*  
*WILLIAM RODLER*

*ILLUSTRATIONS*



*Figure 1A*  
*21"H, 14"W, 6"D*



*Figure 1B*  
*21"H, 14"W, 6"D*





*Figure 2*  
*18"H, 15"W, 6"D*





*Figure 3*  
*17"H, 14"W, 6"D*



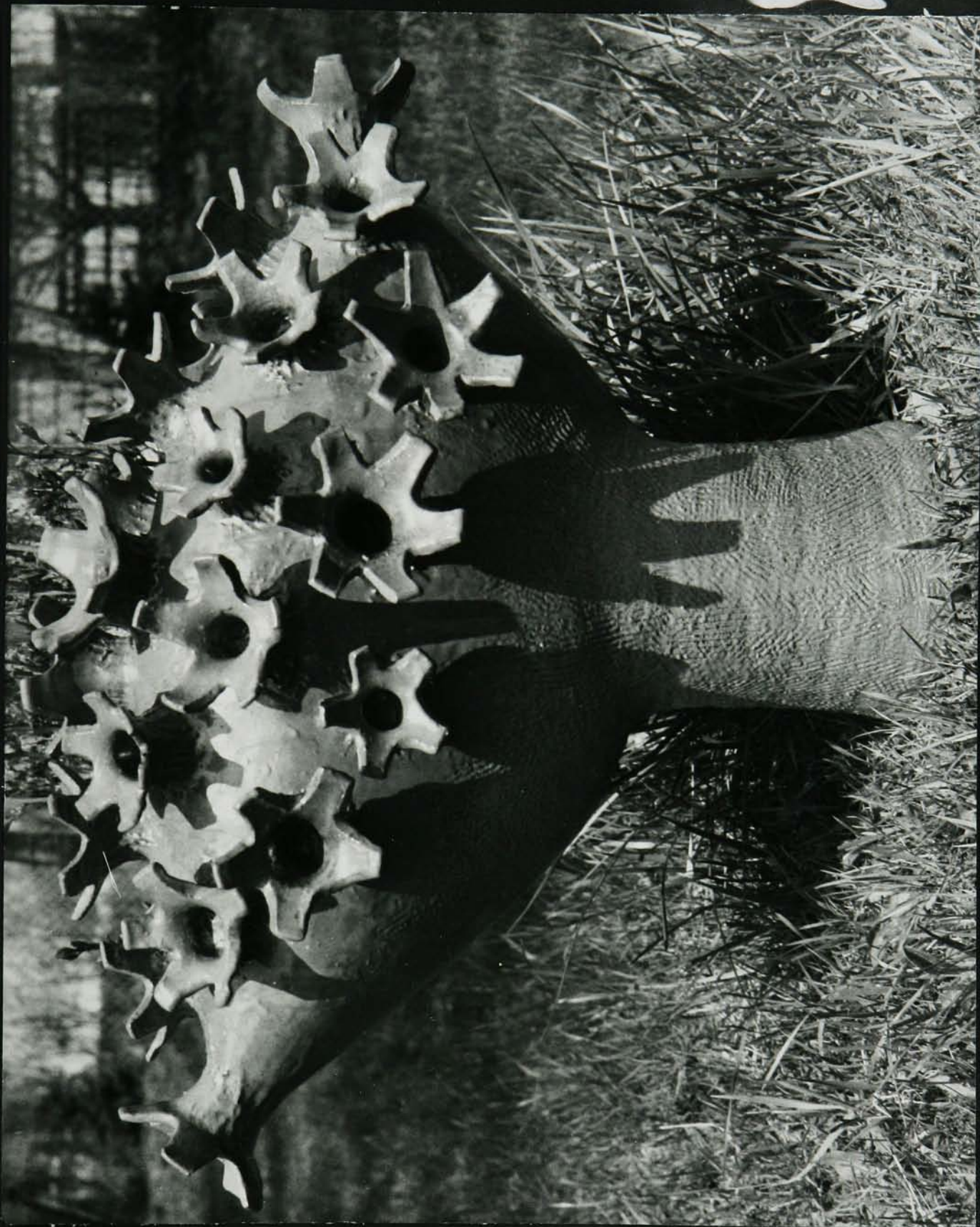
*Figure 4*  
*16"H, 20"W, 10"D*





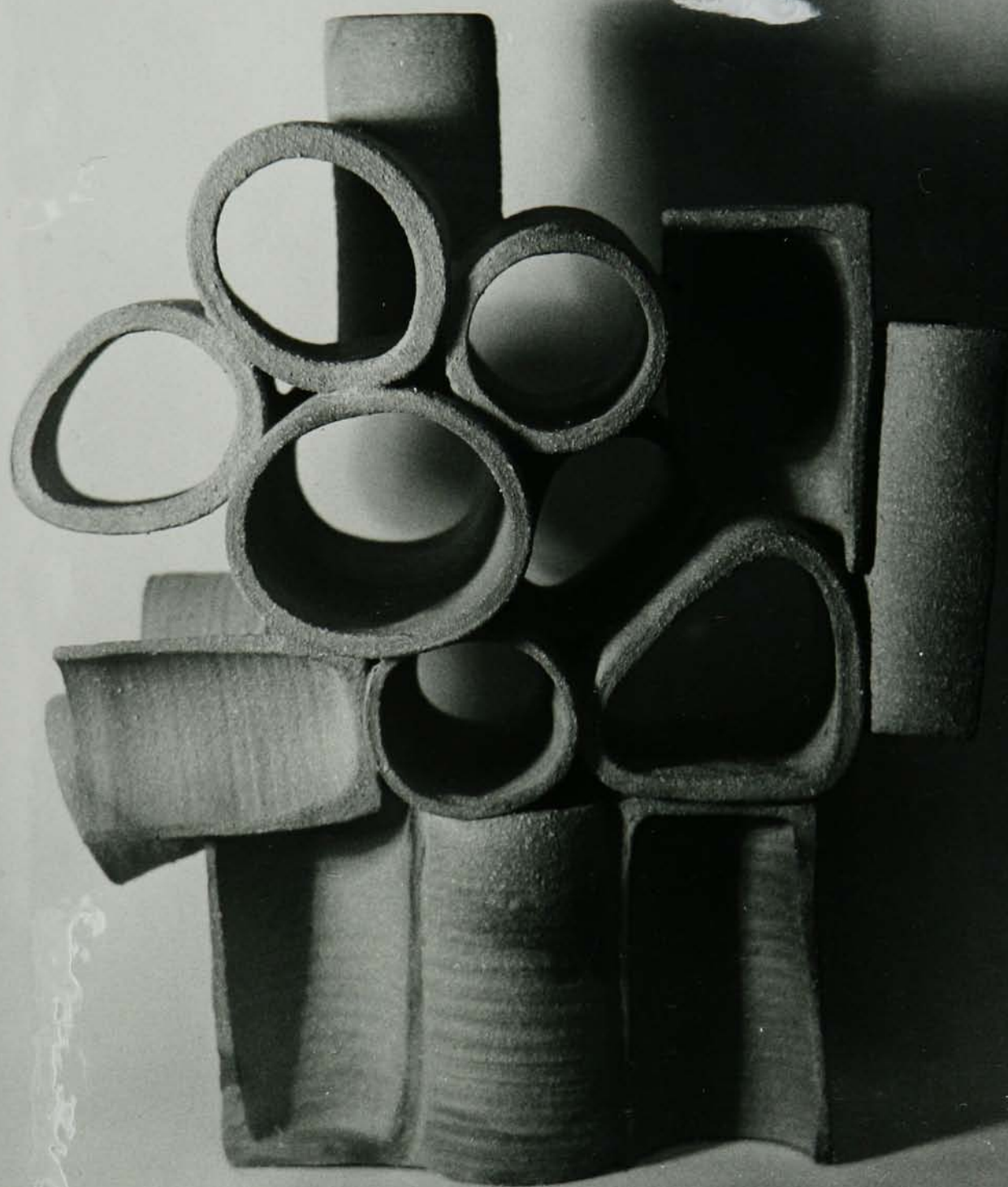
*Figure 5*  
*20"H, 25"W, 12"D*



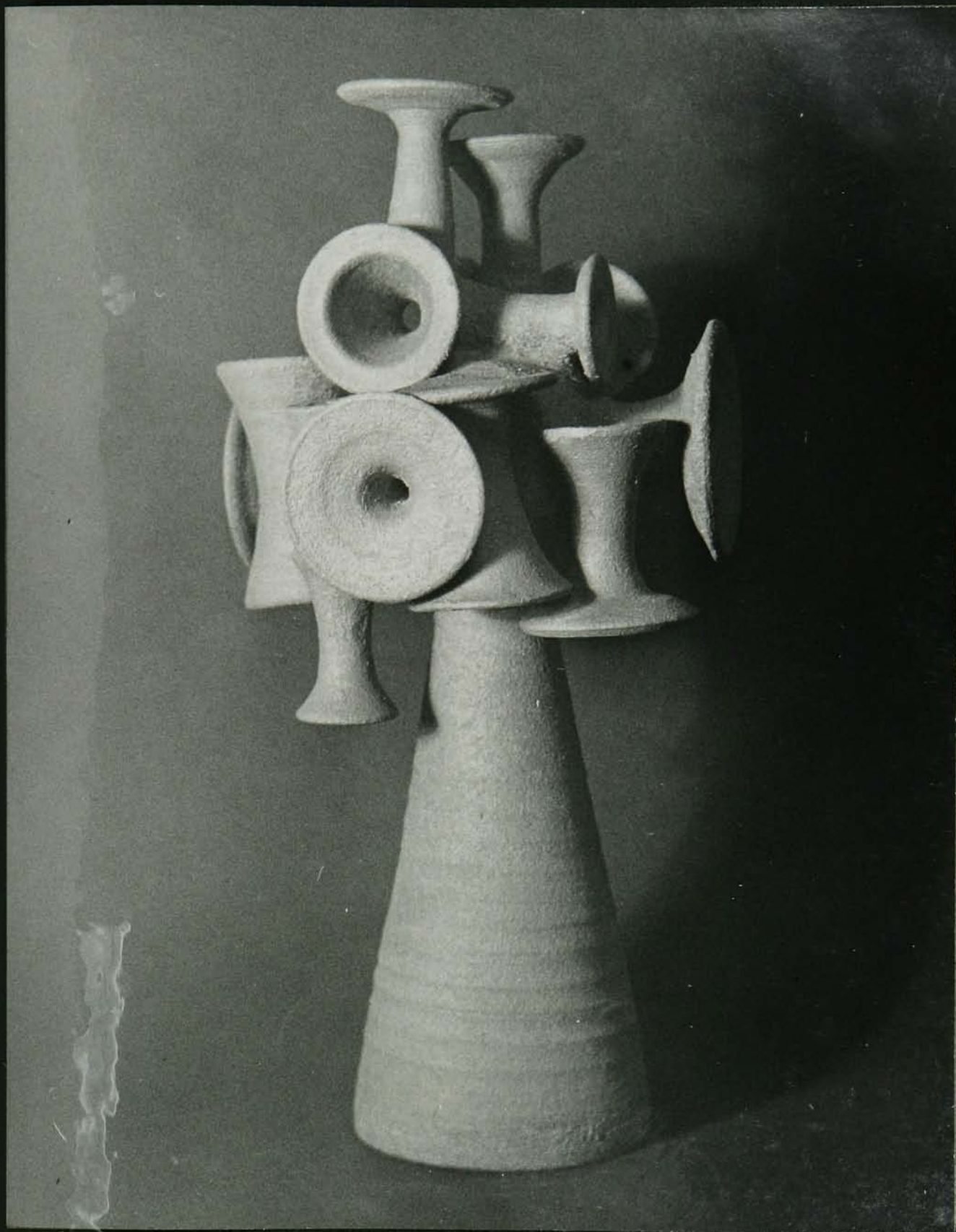


*Figure 6*  
*20"H, 18"W, 9"D*



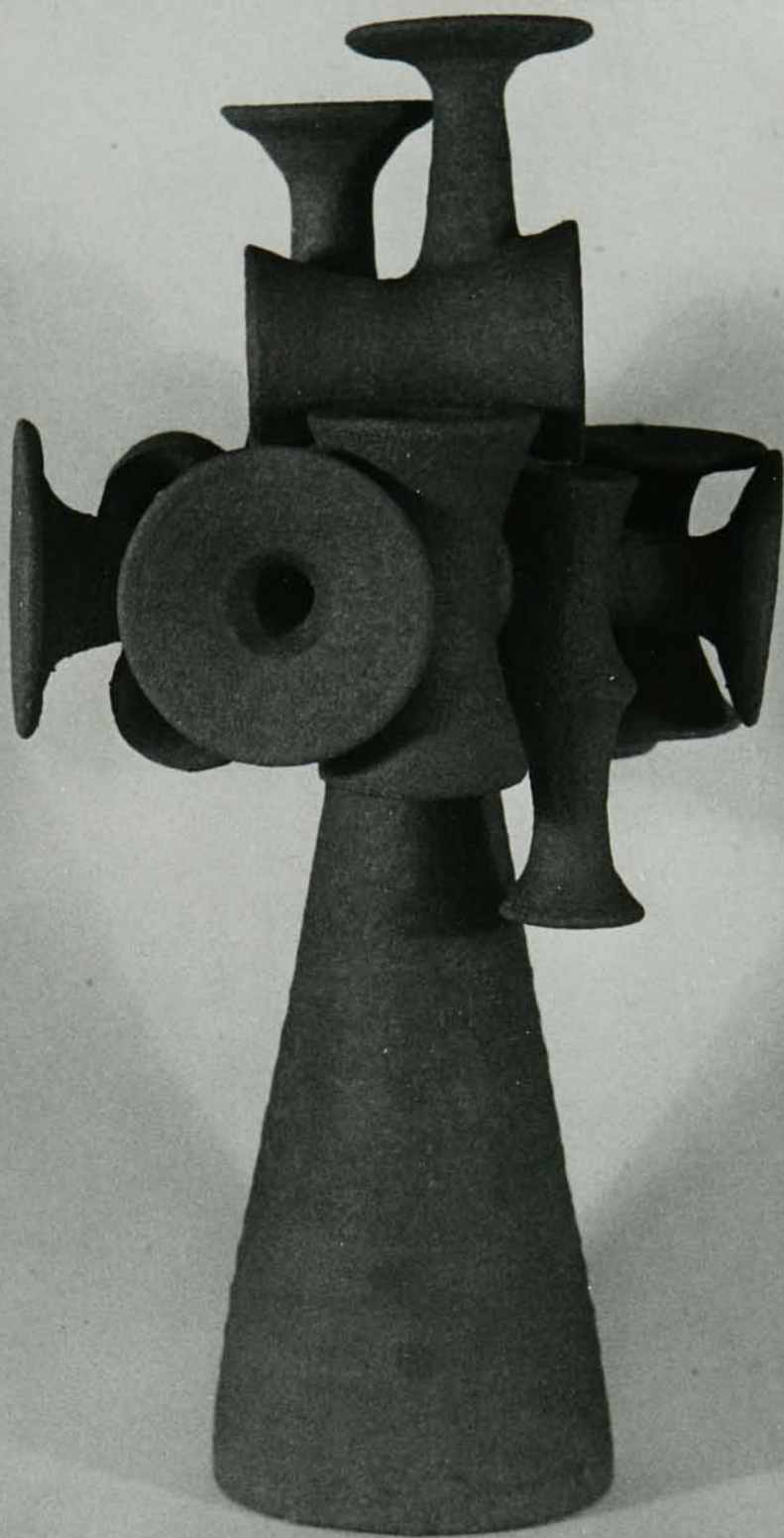


*Figure 7A*  
*18"H, 9"W, 9"D*



*Figure 7B*  
*18"H, 9"W, 9"D*



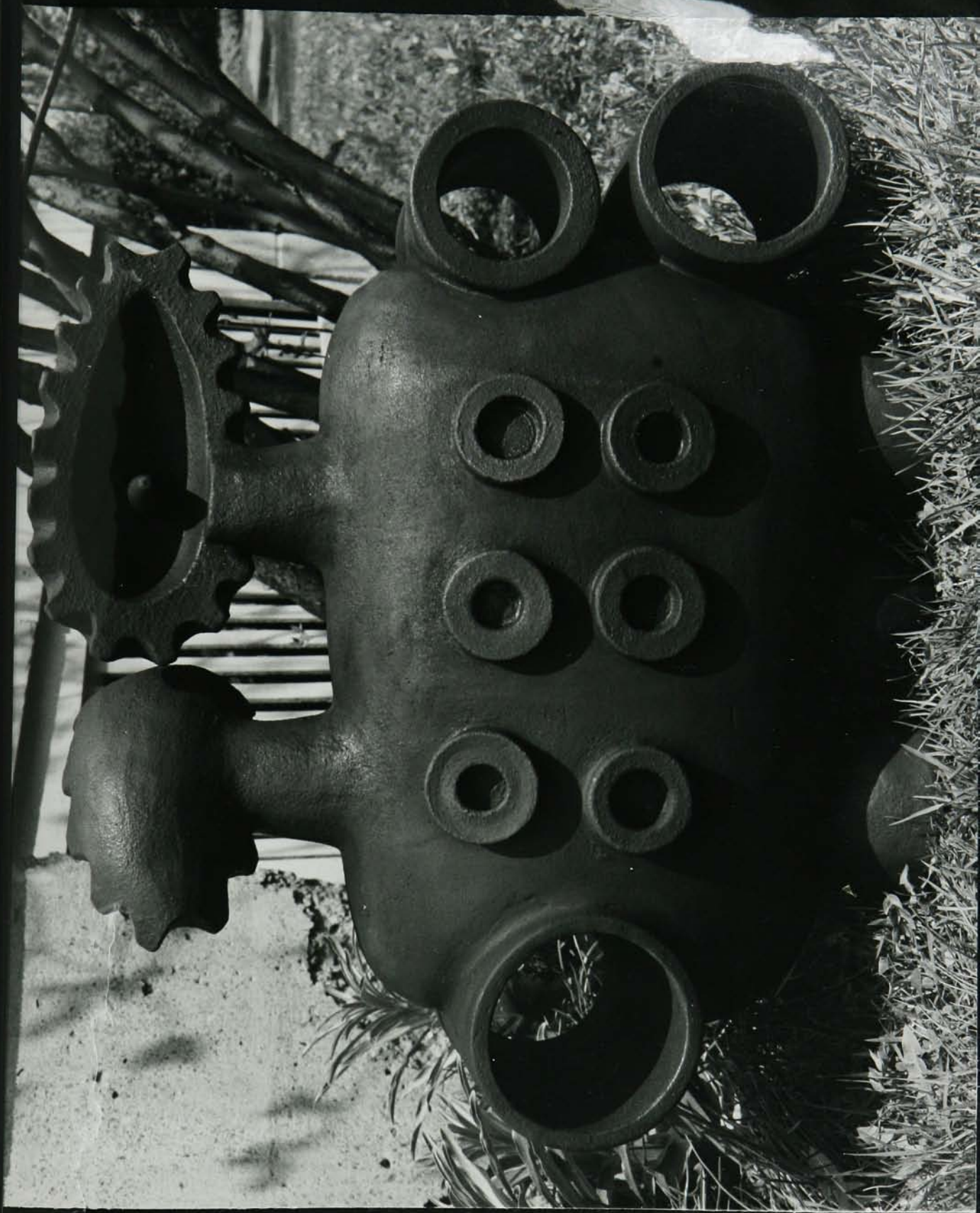


*Figure 8*  
*23"H, 12"W, 9"D*



*Figure 9A*  
*22"H, 26"W, 9"D*





*Figure 9B:*  
*22"H, 26"W, 9"D*



*Figure 10*

*20"H, 12"W, 12"D*





*Figure 11*  
*11"H, 17"W, 8"D*



*Figure 12*  
*18"H, 7"W, 7"D*

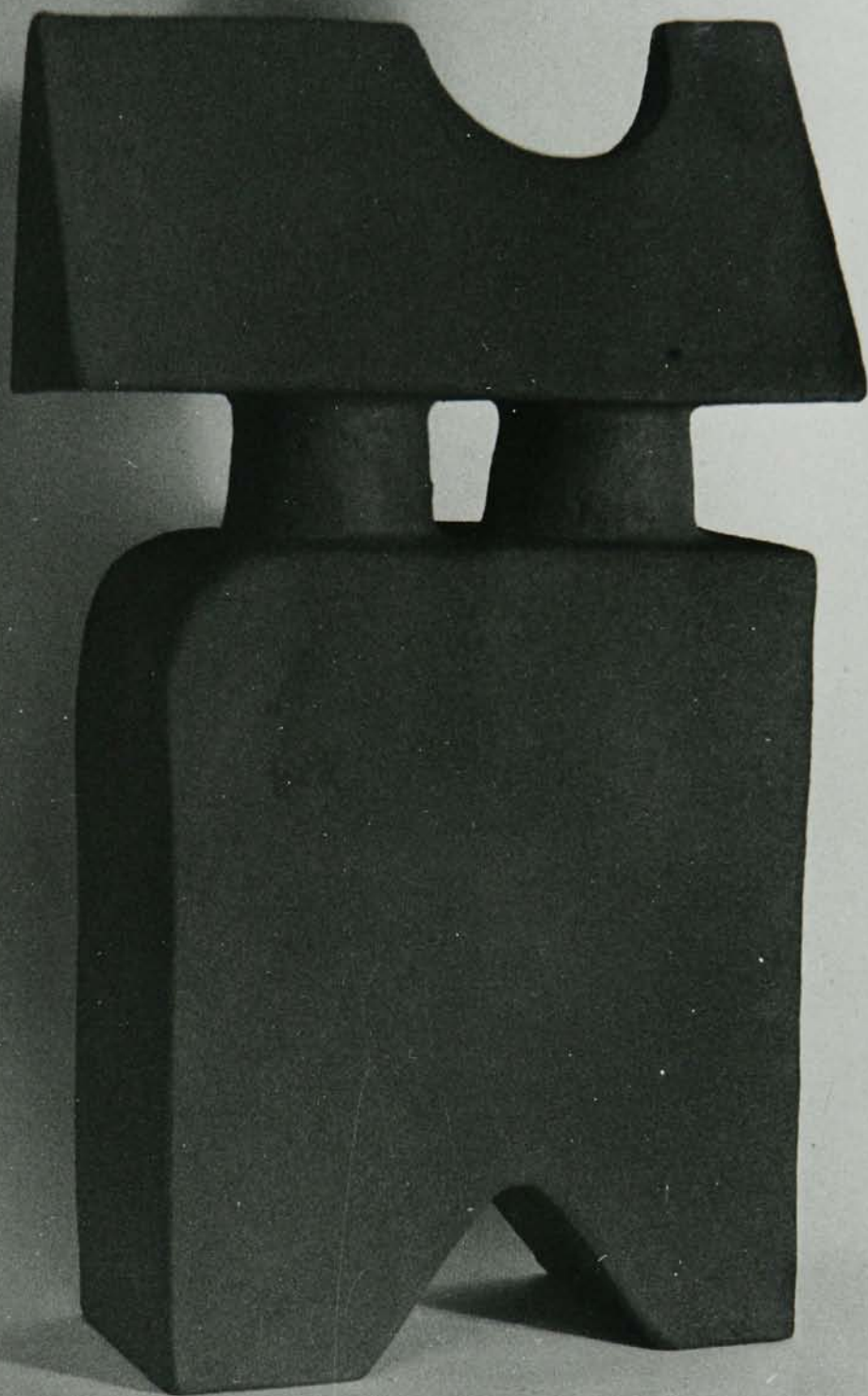




*Figure 13*

*18"H, 11"W, 4"D*





*Figure 14*

*8"H, 22"L, 8"W*





*Figure 15*  
*16"H, 14"W, 7"D*



*Figure 16*  
*22"H, 18"W, 11"D*





*Figure 17*

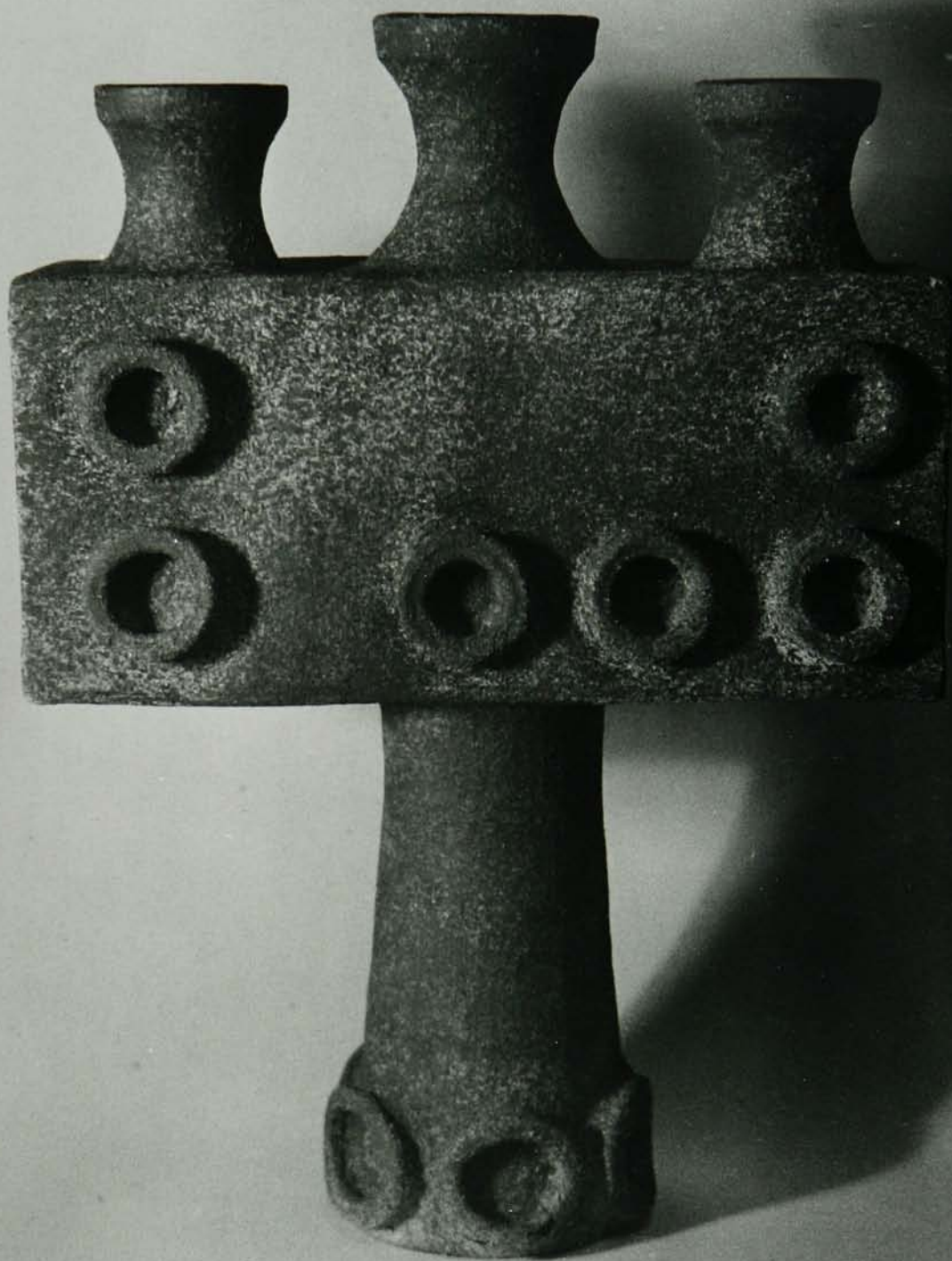
*13"H, 14"W, 7"D*





*Figure 18*  
*18"H, 13"W, 4"D*





*Figure 19*  
*13"H, 14"DIA*





*Figure 20*  
*9"H, 10"DIA*





*Figure 21*  
*12"H, 14"W, 6"D*





*Figure 22*  
*19"H, 9"W, 4"D*





*FIGURE 23*  
*30"L, 15"W, 5"D*





*BIBLIOGRAPHY*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andrews, Michael; Sculpture and Ideas, Prentice Hall, N.J.
- Baldwin, John; Contemporary Sculpture Techniques, Reinhold, New York 1958.
- Feldman, Edmund; Art As Image and Idea, Prentice Hall, N.J.
- Hauser, Arnold; The Social History of Art, New York: Knopf 1951.
- Honey, William B.; European Ceramic Art, London: Faber, 1949.
- Kenny, J.R.; The Complete Book of Pottery Making, New York, Greenberg 1952.
- Meyers, Bernard; Sculpture Form and Method, Reinhold, N.Y. 1951.
- Mills, John; The Technique of Sculpture, Reinhold, N.Y.
- Norton, F.H.; Ceramics for the Artist Potter, Cambridge, Addison Wesley, 1956.
- Rhodes, Daniel; Clay and Glazes for the Potter, Philadelphia: Chilton 1957.
- Schnier, Jacques; Sculpture in Modern America, Los Angeles: University of California Press 1948.
- Struppeck, Jules; The Creation of Sculpture, Henry Holt, N.Y. 1956.
- Welcker, Giedion; Contemporary Sculpture, New York: Wittenboro, 1960.
- Wilenski, R.H.; The Meaning of Modern Sculpture, Holt, N.Y.